

Welcome to Talent-Decisions, a monthly podcast featuring leading practitioners within talent acquisition. The focus of this program is the Final 4 – the final four candidates you are considering to fill a critical position within your organization. If you are a hiring manager struggling to ensure you make the right call or a talent acquisition department leader who wants to be more strategic, this program is for you.

Talent-Decisions is brought to you by Checkster, the leading talent decision platform leveraging collective intelligence to upgrade talent processes, including interviewing, reference checking, and 360 quality feedback. Checkster believes everyone deserves a productive and fulfilling career and that starts with the right talent decision. To learn more about Checkster, visit Checkster on the web at [checkster.com](http://checkster.com).

Welcome to a new Talent-Decisions Channel podcast on TotalPicture Radio. Joining me today is Cheri Hanson, Talent Recruiting Operations Manager at Cargill, a privately held company that employs 142,000 people in 66 countries. Cargill is an international producer and marketer of food, agricultural, financial, and industrial products and services. Cheri, thanks for joining me today on Talent-Decisions.

**Cheri:** Thanks. It's a pleasure to be here.

**Peter:** Let's start out by having you tell us a little bit about your background, your role, and responsibilities at Cargill.

**Cheri:** I've worked for 17 years supporting recruitment systems in both public and private sector organizations. Here in Cargill, I manage the budget, the systems, the data, and the processes for North America recruiting and help support the recruiters and users of Taleo, which is our applicant tracking system who work in and outside of North America.

**Peter:** When we spoke earlier, you mentioned to me that Cargill has really gone through some challenging times recently. You've laid off over 2,000 people and closed plants. How has that affected your approach to recruiting, especially on college campuses?

**Cheri:** That's a good question. All of our businesses paused for a bit this past Fall to reevaluate their continuing hiring needs. Cargill had some ambitious projects underway across the organization. And as an organization, decisions were made to continue pursuing only those projects that were most important to our businesses overall. So other projects were paused for the short term and may be picked up later. So a lot of the people that were on the projects that were paused were redeployed as needed. For some of the projects that continued, RIFs occurred in some places, and then businesses often redefined the jobs they needed to fill based on the new directions and they kept moving forward from there.

As of now, req volume is still down but hires are still being made where businesses have continued to need staff. On our college campuses, however, not much has changed. Cargill views the college hires as a pipeline to build our organization so that the level of interns and co-ops we're bringing on this summer is only slightly down from years past. We just went through our forecasting for our next fiscal year and businesses didn't decrease their forecasts for interns and co-ops for the 2012-2013 fiscal year by much either. We view that as a good sign that they understand the long term investment in college hiring and how that helps us promote from within and build our talent in-house year over year. I think one of the biggest mistakes you can make during a slight downturn in your company's performance is to stop the branding and presence at a university. So we still need to maintain those relationships and so we're continuing to be there.

**Peter:** As you mentioned, Cheri, Cargill is recruiting. I checked your experienced hire openings and found jobs such as wheat analytical manager, polymer trader, fermentation process technologist, senior technology security analyst, and farm marketer. Just a guess, these are not the easiest positions to fill. How do you go about finding qualified candidates for your experienced hires?

**Cheri:** It's a fascinating business to recruit for, certainly. We use a variety of sourcing methods to find top talent in the various industries within Cargill. That can include a lot of professional organizations, networking, LinkedIn, niche job boards as well as some of the still more traditional methods, such as job board aggregators, major job boards, and social networking sites like LinkedIn Recruiter.

We also have a sourcing team that we're building this next year to help identify hard to find talent. Because a lot of times, there's actually only a few people in the world who have the skills we need for a particular job. So when you hear about the idea of the talent wars, Cargill certainly understands that and that affects us as well.

One of the interesting tools that we use in the course of our business is Checkster, which is an online reference checking tool. We ask all candidates that we set up for interviews to go through the reference checking process prior to interview so that we have rich information on the people we're going to interview. And so if we're hiring a polymer trader, for instance, we may interview three or four candidates. Each of those people may have five or more references who responded to that request. That can turn into 15 to 20 potential candidates or people that we may be able to tap into who know other polymer traders in the industry. As part of the Checkster process at the end of the questionnaire that they fill out, we ask them if it's okay if we contact them about future opportunities. If they say yes, they're included in this little database within Checkster, so we can search for those by title, by company, etc. So if a candidate makes it to an interview status and we think then they're pretty good and good talent usually uses other good talent to provide references for them. So using Checkster in this way which isn't its primary purpose, we create our own niche side of hard to find candidates for future consideration. So a lot of these people don't have their résumés out on the web some place. Polymer traders, you can't find them on the web. High intensity sweetener scientists aren't on the web. So you have to have these little networking opportunities and seize them where you can find them.

**Peter:** That's really interesting. On an average, how many applicants do you get per job?

**Cheri:** It ranges. Our average overall is about 50 but it can range between five and several hundred based on the type of the job that we've advertised.

**Peter:** Cheri, how do you reduce that number down to the final three or four candidates you're most interested in?

**Cheri:** We use Taleo's pre-screening questions to screen out those who don't meet the minimum quals of the position. That's typically about a third of the people who apply, which is quite a bit. So then we use additional questions to find those who meet most of our preferred skills that we're looking for if the pool is large. And then we review the résumés of those candidates to find the top talent within that group. So on average, we read about one of every six résumés we receive. Then from that, we phone screen four or five of those people to get to a shortlist that we recommend for interviews with hiring managers and their interview teams.

**Peter:** How many rounds of interviews does a professional hire generally go through at Cargill?

**Cheri:** Usually they're here for just one day and then they're either going to go through one interview with maybe four interviewers—or two interviews with two teams of two. So there's typically only one round of interviews or one event day for interviews.

**Peter:** And with whom do they interview and what is the process you use for evaluating these interviews at the end of the day?

**Cheri:** That's a good question. Our hiring manager is involved plus usually it's colleagues of the potential new team member, and sometimes the one up manager from the hiring manager themselves. And then Cargill has a leadership model that we use for our performance management across every position in the company. The hiring manager uses that same sort of model to rate the candidates on their job related experience and the elements that are included in that leadership model. It can be things like their execution capacity, their job knowledge, their integrity, learning capacity, conviction, courage, and things like that. All of that still relates back to their performance once they're an employee.

**Peter:** Cheri, as you know this show is called Talent-Decisions, so I really want to know what the process you use at Cargill for making the final decision. How do you get to that candidate that you're going to make the job offer to?

**Cheri:** We have calibration sessions that are facilitated by the recruiter for an open position. They meet with the people that were on

the interview team and they make sure they sort of align the scores that each person gave them and take a look at everyone's information and then they use that information in aggregate to determine who should be the final candidate to whom we make an offer.

**Peter:** Do you use a different process when you're recruiting college grads?

**Cheri:** It's a little bit different, yes. We have people from the businesses who attend career fairs at the schools who graduate students in the majors that we hire for; mainly engineers, finance, food science, quality assurance. They review résumés one by one submitted through the university. They decide who they're going to interview on campus and then they recommend about four of the top candidates from each school to come to a final round of interviews here at Cargill's headquarters in Minneapolis. We make offers for candidates for winter, spring, summer, and fall co-ops and internships. And then our fulltime university hires are actually only people who have interned or completed a co-op for us previously. We rarely hire someone straight from campus for a fulltime position. So that is a little different but they do still use the Cargill leadership model as their appraisal guide.

**Peter:** How many recruiters do you have as part of your team?

**Cheri:** In the United States, we currently have about 14 experienced recruiters and five [for] university, and that's based on requisition volumes. In the past, it's been as high as 35 recruiters for the experienced [team]. University doesn't really change that much year over year.

What we've done in the past couple of years, we realigned by function rather than business unit so that people really understand the whole marketplace that they're hiring for. We just take a look at what's the anticipated hiring volume and different functions. Sometimes one recruiter may have several functions that they hire for kind of, again, based on the volume. Some functions even have more than one recruiter. And then what we do is every month we track their workloads to be sure no one's getting overloaded in their one area, and we'll reassign some new requisitions as they come in to other

recruiters who might be working in a somewhat similar area if they can take on the additional hires.

**Peter:** Do you use any outside executive search firms or staffing agencies in recruiting?

**Cheri:** For executive search firms that's rare. I think 2 percent of our hires for experienced hires in the United States come from agencies. But we do amplify and augment our own staffing team with third party recruiters historically when volume has suddenly gone through the roof. I think a couple of years ago we had our forecast of what volume the businesses said they were going to do, and it actually doubled that.

**Peter:** Wow.

**Cheri:** So because that was a huge staffing need, we brought in contractors for a limited period of time while we worked through that.

**Peter:** Cheri, once you've made the hire, how do you go about tracking the success of that candidate once they become part of your organization?

**Cheri:** We're about to start something new. We are implementing a new quality of hire survey for the experienced hires. We had done that in the past just for North America but we've made some changes to that and they're going to keep going forward on a global basis in about another month, a month and a half. What we're going to do this time is we're asking both the hiring managers and the new hires for some feedback on how they think they're doing in their new role, whether they think they're going to be staying or leaving in the next year, etc. We have an open-ended commentary where they can provide other feedback. This is all done on Likert scales, except for the comments. So we score those responses and combine the scores from the hiring managers and the new hires with a score that we assign to new hire turnover data of how many people have left in the last two years that we hired. We're going to combine all that to derive a composite score. We're going to roll that out after we did a short pilot with about 60 hires. That's going to roll out actually globally in a couple of months.

For campus hires we do something a little different. It's not as formal at this point. Currently the recruiting leads will review data in our HRMS system to see how many former interns, co-ops, and fulltime hires have remained with Cargill several years after their initial hire. They look at what are they doing now, whether they've been promoted, what's their performance ratings. And then we also have for interns and co-ops, the teams also ask the hiring managers to complete a performance review on those new hires to determine how well they succeeded in their short term role. We use that information to determine who are we going to make offers to for fulltime jobs.

**Peter:** Interesting. Cheri, what advice can you share with someone who wants to work within your organization about the recruiting process at Cargill? What's unique about your process?

**Cheri:** I think what's not so much unique but is something that can be irritating is that Cargill can be known for taking some time in moving through the selection process. We want to be very deliberate in ensuring that we find top talent who'll be happy working in Cargill's environment. Fit really matters to us. We need people to understand that we want to be sure to find people who we think are going to be successful here and that can take a little longer. We don't hire hastily. We spend a lot of time talking to candidates ahead of time to be sure that they understand the work environment before they join. We have a pretty high offer acceptance rate. It's pretty much better than benchmark in the marketplace; in part, I think because we make sure that we get to know a person and what motivates them before we make that offer.

**Peter:** What is your average time to fill?

**Cheri:** Average time to fill is about 54 days right now.

**Peter:** Cheri, like you said, you've spent 17 years working in recruiting, staffing, and HR systems management, what has been the biggest single transformation you've seen in recruiting over these years?

**Cheri:** I think it's the sheer magnitude of information that's available to candidates and companies about each other. So with the expansion of the internet, there's so much information that candidates and

employees will freely share about what it's like to work for a company, who they might know who works there, what's the interview process is like. You can even look at how social networking sites are combining with job boards to link up people they might know within a company. I think recently Glassdoor and Facebook have things. If you go on one site, you can look at the other to say who do I know at this company. On the flipside, companies can also scan the web for information about candidates. Cargill recruiters don't check Facebook or other non-business social networking sites for information on candidates but it's certainly a possibility in the world of work nowadays. Candidates, I think, need to be cognizant of their public brand as well.

I think that there's just so much information available within a few clicks and I think both candidates and companies can go into a working arrangement with eyes wide open in ways that just weren't possible 10 years ago even. The understanding for better opportunities for what it's like to work for a company is far greater than it was. Companies understand this too-- what's out there about them can be good, bad, or otherwise but I think it's good for everybody to understand what is their brand in the employment marketplace so companies can take corrective steps where necessary.

I think it's also good for candidates to know what to expect when they join a new company. I think the amount of reduction in surprises once you join a company is both on the company side as well as the candidates', and I think that transparency has driven the right behaviors for both stakeholders in the process.

**Peter:** Great. Is there anything I haven't asked you in this interview today, Cheri, that you'd like to share with the audience?

**Cheri:** Minnesota isn't as cold as everybody thinks it is. We're having a wonderful – come on up. It's okay. It's not always snowing. ☺

**Peter:** Thank you so much for taking time to speak with us today on TotalPicture Radio's Talent-Decisions.

**Cheri:** Thanks, Peter. It's been a pleasure.

**Peter:** Thank you.

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